00929

1963/08/28

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TOP SECRET

CORRECTION ISSUED: 8/28/63; 1:30 P.M.; DMJ

Action SS

Control: 22804

Rec'd: AUGUST 28, 1963 7:18 A.M.

Info

FROM: SAIGON - CORRECTED PAGES 1 AND 2

TO: Secretary of State

NO: 364, AUGUST 28, 6 P.M. (SECTION ONE OF TWO)

EMERGENCY

ACTION DEPARTMENT 364, INFO CINCPAC OPERATIONAL IMMEDIATE 234

DEPARTMENT EYES ONLY FOR SECRETARY

CINCPAC EXCLUSIVE FOR FELT

DEPTEL 256.

IN APPRAISING CURRENT PROSPECTS, IT MUST BE BORNE IN MIND THAT OUR KNOWLEDGE OF COMPOSITION OF COUP GROUP AND THEIR PLANS IS DERIVED FROM SINGLE SOURCE. WE HAVE HIGH CONFIDENCE AUTHENTICITY OF THIS INFORMATION BUT ARE TAKING STEPS ASSURE OURSELVES THAT GENERALIZING MINH IS INVOLVED [redacted] MINH HAS ASKED SEE [redacted] TOMORROW MORNING AT JGS.) VICE PRESIDENT THO'S REMARKS TO ME THIS MORNING (REPORTED BELOW) WERE ENTIRELY CONSISTENT WITH HIS HAVING BEEN BROUGHT IN ON PLANS BUT DO NOT PROVE HE HAS BEEN. TURNING TO NUMBERED QUESTIONS REFTEL:

1. GENERALS CITED [redacted] AS MEMBERS COUP COMMITTEE ARE BEST GROUP THAT COULD BE ASSEMBLED IN TERMS OF ABILITY AND ORIENTATION. CERTAIN OF THEM (VMIG MINH, KHANH AND KIM) ARE CONSIDERED TO HAVE PERSONAL FORCE OF CHARACTER. WE BELIEVE THAT THEY WOULD ALL UNITE UNDER LEADERSHIP OF BIG MINH. QUESTION OF THEIR STRENGTH IS DEALT WITH IN PARA 3 BELOW.

2. WE BELIEVE THAT ALL FACTORS CITED PARA 2 REFTEL ARGUE FOR PROMPT ACTION AND THAT CHANCES OF SUCCESS WOULD BE DIMINISHED BY DELAY.

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SANITIZED

NLK 82-96

BY [illegible] NARA DATE 11/87

~~TOP SECRET~~

DELAY. IN PARTICULAR, WE ARE CONCERNED OVER POSSIBILITY ATTEMPT BY NHU TO ARREST LEADERS. WE ASSUME GENERALS ARE GUARDING AGAINST THIS POSSIBILITY.

3. LINEUP AND ORIENTATION OF FORCES IN METROPOLITAN AREA. FOR DETAILED LISTING, [redacted]

A. THE FORCES LISTED IN ABOVE MESSAGE AS NON-ARVN TOTAL 7,750 AND MUST BE CONSIDERED COMMITTED TO DEFENSE OF PALACE, IF ALL ARE IN FACT ALIGNED UNDER TUNG. POSSIBILITY EXISTS, HOWEVER, THAT GENERALS MAY BE ABLE TO DRIVE WEDGE BETWEEN TUNG AND TU, POLICE COMMISSIONER, WHO COMMANDS BULK OF POLICE.

B. THE ARVN FORCES LISTED ARE ALL UNDER THE COMMAND OF GENERAL DINH WITH EXCEPTION 6TH ABN BN MENTIONED BELOW. SIGNIFICANT, HOWEVER, THAT WITH MINOR EXCEPTIONS, TROOPS ARE NOT ORGANIC TO THE III CORPS, WHICH HE NORMALLY HEADS. THESE TROOPS FALL INTO TWO MAIN CATEGORIES: (1) THE FORCES OF THE CAPITAL MILITARY DISTRICT, HEADED BY GENERAL LA WHO IS DINH'S DEPUTY FOR THE SAIGON-CHOLON AREA, AND (2) UNITS OF THE GENERAL RESERVE (AIRBORNE AND MARINE BRIGADES), NORMALLY CONTROLLED BY THE JCS.

C. COLONEL VIEN, COMMANDING THE ABN BRIGADE, HAS THE SINGLE, MOST POWERFUL AND COHESIVE UNIT IN SAIGON. THUS, HIS ACTIONS ARE CRUCIAL TO THE SUCCESS OF INITIAL MOVES. HIS LOYALTIES HAVE RUN TO DIEM AND HE IS CLOSE TO DINH. BUT HE IS ALSO AWARE OF THE OUTSPOKEN OPPOSITION OF THE BULK OF HIS OFFICERS TO THE PRESENT REGIME. WE HAVE REPORTS THAT THIS HAS CAUSED A REORIENTATION OF HIS THINKING AND THAT HE WOULD IMMEDIATELY SWING IF DINH SWUNG, AND, ALTERNATIVELY, THAT HE COULD BE PERSUADED TO SWING WITHOUT DINH BEFORE OR IN THE OPENING STAGES OF THE REVOLT. IF THE GENERALS CAN COUNT ON THE AIRBORNE, SUCCESS MIGHT COME QUICKLY AND WITH MINIMUM VIOLENCE

~~TOP SECRET~~

-3- 364, AUGUST 28, 6 P.M., FROM SAIGON (SECTION ONE OF TWO)

VIOLENCE. IF NOT, THE STRUGGLE MIGHT BE BLOODY AND EXTENDED. UNDER LATTER CIRCUMSTANCES, ESTIMATE HERE IS THAT THE GENERALS WOULD RESORT TO STRATAGEM TO NEUTRALIZE VIEN, RATHER THAN ASSAULT FORCES HE COMMANDS. ON BALANCE, WE BELIEVE THAT GENERALS CANNOT COUNT ON VIEN, BUT MAY HAVE SUPPORT OF CERTAIN UNITS OF THE BRIGADE. CERTAINLY, THE 6TH BN HAS BEEN POSITIONED AT JGS HQ, UNDER JGS CONTROL, BECAUSE THE COUP GROUP IS CONFIDENT OF ITS COMMANDER'S LOYALTY.

D. THE TWO MARINE BNS ARE ALSO IN KEY POSITIONS. SECURITY MISSION OF ONE BATTALION (SECOND IS NEARBY IN RESERVE) EXTENDS FROM PALACE TO WATERFRONT, AN AREA WHICH INCLUDES NUMEROUS VITJM INSTALLATIONS: PTT, NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, AMERICAN BILLETS. THIS BN IS CLOSELY REGULAR UNIT TO PALACE. ESTIMATE IS THAT COMMANDER, COLONEL KHANG, WILL OPT FOR THE GENERALS.

E. WE MUST ASSUME BULK OF REMAINING ARVN FORCES ARE UNDER EFFECTIVE CONTROL OF GENERAL LA. HIS TROOPS ARE NUMEROUS BUT LACK COHENSION, BEING PRIMARILY INDEPENDENT COMPANIES AND LIGHTLY ARMED. THEY ARE CERTAINLY NOT SHOCOCK TROOPS. IN A SHOWDOWN, LA WOULD NOT NECESSARILY TAKE ORDERS FROM DINH.

F. IN GENERAL, ABOVE REMARKS APPLY EQUALLY TO AIR AND NAVAL ELEMENTS IN SAIGOUN AREA. THEY ARE NOT ORGANIZED OR EQUIPPED FOR GROUND COMBAT AND THEIR EFFECTIVENESS THEREFORE LIMITED. NEITHER IS LIKELY TO ACT AS A COHENSIVE ENTITY.

GP-1

PLH

LODGE

NOTE: PASSED WHITE HOUSE-CIA-OSD WITH SPECIAL CAPTIONS 8/28/63

(#) OMISSION. CORRECTION TO FOLLOW.

* AS RECEIVED.

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INCOMING TELEGRAM *Department of State* 56

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Action

SS

Info

TOP SECRET

Control: 22834
Rec'd: AUGUST 28, 1963
7:36 AM

FROM: SAIGON

TO: Secretary of State

NO: 364, AUGUST 28, 6 PM (SECTION TWO OF TWO) EYES ONLY 003

EMERGENCY

ACTION DEPARTMENT 364, INFORMATION CINCPAC OPERATIONAL IMMEDIATE 234.

DEPARTMENT EYES ONLY FOR SECRETARY

CINCPAC EXCLUSIVE FOR FELT

G. IMPLICIT IN FOREGOING IS THEME THAT WHILE DINH IS COMMANDER, HIS CONTROL OF THE HETEROGENEOUS FORCES ASSIGNED IS FAR FROM ASSURED. HIS MAJOR SUBORDINATES MAY FOLLOW HIS BIDDING, BUT THEY ALSO PRESERVE FREEDOM OF ACTION TO NON-COMPLY OR EVEN ACT IN DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED MANNER. SHOULD DINH BE REMOVED OR NEUTRALIZED, [redacted] IS COMPETENT TO CARRY ON AND WOULD, UNQUESTIONABLY, SIDE WITH THE GENERALS.

H. SHOULD THE INITIAL MOVES RESULT IN STALEMATE, THE ISSUE MAY TURN ON RELATIVE ABILITY TO REINFORCE. OUR ESTIMATE IS THAT TIME AS WELL AS FORCE WILL WORK TO ADVANTAGE OF INSURGENTS AND FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

(1) THE MOST IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE TROOPS ARE THE 2 ABN BNS AND UNITS OF THE III CORPS. BALANCE HERE MIGHT NOT BE IN FAVOR OF GENERALS.

(2) FIRST REINFORCEMENT FROM IV CORPS WOULD BE 47TH REGT FROM LONG AN PROINCE, BORDERING THE SAIGON AREA ON THE SOUTH. NEWLY ARRIVED FROM II CORPS, IT WOULD BE RESPONSIVE TO KHANH [redacted] AND LATTER COULD NOT STOP ITS MOVEMENT TO /CAPITAL.

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-2- 364, AUGUST 28, 6 PM (SECTION TWO OF TWO) FROM SAIGON

CAPITAL.

(3) MOST READILY DEPLOYABLE MAJOR UNIT IN NORTH IS KHANH'S 9TH DIVISIONS. IF TAN SON NHUT AND/OR BIEN HOA OPEN, 3-4 BNS COULD BE SHIFTED SAIGON DAILY VIA C-123'S.

(4) OVER THE LONG RUN, THE COUP GROUP HAS MORE FORCE AT HIS DISPOSAL THAN DO DINH, [redacted] TUNG.

AND MOST OF ALL, THEIR THINKING REFLECTS THE SENTIMENTS OF THE MAJORITY OF THE OFFICER CORPS.

4. AS STATED ABOVE, WE BELIEVE BALANCE WOULD TIP IN FAVOR OF COUP GROUP IN EVENT INITIAL STATEMENT. CHANCES OF THIS WOULD BE GREATLY ENHANCED IF AT CRITICAL JUNCTURE U.S. PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED THAT ALL AID THROUGH THE DIEM GOVERNMENT HAD CEASED AND WOULD BE RESUMED AS SOON AS CONDITIONS WARRANTED. IT WOULD BE SOMEWHAT BETTER FOR PUBLIC STANDING OF FUTURE GOVERNMENT IF THIS WERE NOT DONE. HOWEVER, BELIEVE I SHOULD HAVE STANDBY AUTHORITY TO MAKE DECLARATION TO THIS EFFECT, IMPLYING TERMINATION OF AID TO PRESENT GVN IF IN MY JUDGMENT IT IS NECESSAY TO SUCCESS COUP.

ANOTHER FACTOR FAVORING COUP FORCES IS STALEMATE WOULD BE U.S. ASSISTANCE IN TERMS MILITARY ADVICE, COMMUNICATIONS, TROOP LIFT, ETC.

5. ON BASIS OF WHAT WE NOW KNOW BOTH GENERAL HARKINS AND I FAVOR OPERATION.

FOLLOWING IS BRIEF MEMO MY CONVERSATION WITH THO THIS MORNING:

BEGIN TEXT. AT CALL ON VICE PRESIDENT THO I BEGAN BY SAYING HOW HONORED I WAS TO BE IN VIET-NAM AND BEGAN A VERY CONVENTIONAL CONVERSATION ABOUT HIS HOME IN THE DELTA, THE U.N., AND THE POSSIBILITY OF VIET-NAM SOMEDAY HAVING A FAVORABLE TRADE BALANCE. ALL OF A SUDDEN HE STOPPED AND HIS WHOLE TONE OF VOICE CHANGED AND HE SAID: "IT CAN'T GO ON IN THIS WAY. WE ABSOLUTELY MUST GET OUT OF THE STATE WE ARE IN. EMOTIONS ARE RISING SO HIGH THAT IT IS VERY DANGEROUS. RELATIONS BETWEEN THE U.S. AND VIET-NAM ARE BECOMING QUESTION OF INTERNAL POLITICS BOTH HERE AND IN YOUR COUNTRY. YOU HAVE A VERY GREAT

/RESPONSIBILITY

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-3- 364, AUGUST 28, 6 PM (SECTION TWO OF TWO) FROM SAIGON

RESPONSIBILITY AS AMBASSADOR. PEOPLE EXPECT MUCH FROM YOU. I DON'T KNOW HOW TO DO IT BUT IT ABSOLUTELY MUST BE DONE."
END TEXT

REPORT OF FURTHER MEETING WITH KHIEM FOLLOWS [redacted]

GP-1

LODGE

REE

NOTE: PASSED WHITE HOUSE, OSD, CIA 8:30 AM 8/28/63

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